The Philippine Department of Tourism
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on the DOT

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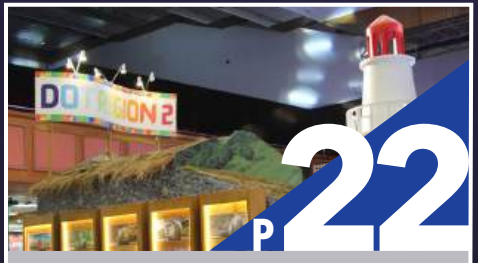

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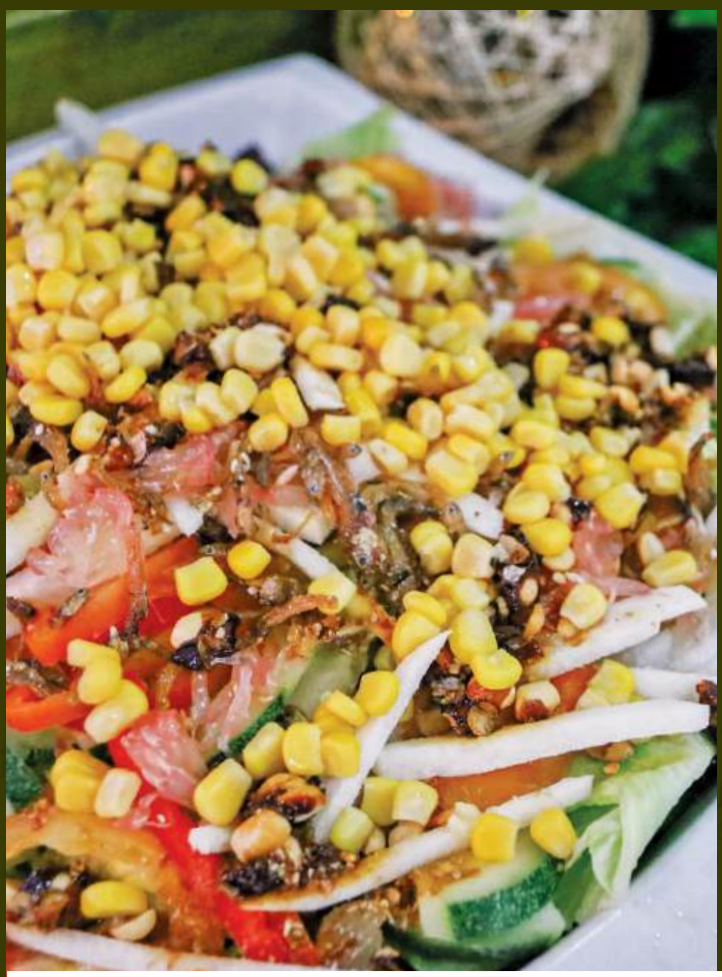
DOT gathers members of the diplomatic corps to promote Mindanao's halal cuisine and culture

UNESCO Gastronomy City citation for Iloilo boosts gastro, creative tourism - DOT

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco congratulates Iloilo City for its inclusion in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Creative Cities Network (UCCN) for Gastronomy on November 1.

"The Department of Tourism extends its sincerest congratulations to Iloilo City, under the leadership of Mayor Jerry Treñas, for its remarkable entry into the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Iloilo City is a gastronomic haven for both Filipinos and international visitors, and a hallmark of our Filipino culinary heritage," Secretary Frasco expressed regarding this significant achievement.

Secretary Frasco further emphasized, *"The Department of Tourism commits to continue its support for our creative cities under the Marcos administration's thrust to further develop, promote, and expand our tourism product portfolio towards multi-dimensional tourism. This includes a strong focus on the food and creative industries, which will undoubtedly bolster the Philippines' attractiveness as a preferred destination for travelers. We are eager to visit Iloilo by the end of November for the launch of the Philippine Experience Heritage, Culture, and Arts Caravan for Western Visayas."*



Iloilo City, in the company of 54 other cities announced by UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, officially joined the Creative Cities Network on World Cities Day on October 31, 2023.

This designation reflects Iloilo's rich culinary heritage and reinforces its role in preserving and promoting Philippine food culture. The city is renowned for signature dishes such as La Paz Batchoy, Pancit Molo, local favorites like K.B.L. (Kadyos, Baboy, at Langka), the charcoal-roasted native chicken Darag, as well as its famous giant siopao and fresh seafood.

The DOT's Region VI Office recently launched the "Slow Food in Western Visayas" culinary and rural tourism event program in Iloilo City in September.

DOT Regional Director for Western Visayas, Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez, announced that the Regional Office is developing itineraries to actively promote slow food experiences for tourists, enabling them to engage in and observe food preparation and ingredients farming.

Other food and creative industry projects of the DOT Region VI include the Western Visayas Sugar Heritage Trail, Boracay Food Crawl, Cultural and Film Tourism, including promotional projects for Antique, CineKasimanwa, CineIsla, and the Department's flagship program: Philippine Experience: Culture, Heritage, and Arts Caravan.

Iloilo City has made history by becoming one of the Philippine cities, alongside Baguio and Cebu City, to join the prestigious UCCN. Baguio City has held the UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art title since 2017, while Cebu City was recognized as the country's inaugural UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2019.

With these latest additions, the UNESCO Network now boasts 350 cities across more than one hundred countries, spanning seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music.

Launched in 2004, the UCCN primarily aims to foster collaboration among cities that recognize creativity as a fundamental catalyst for sustainable urban development. ***DOT***

Philippines, Japan ink deal on tourism cooperation

Manila, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Japanese Government's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLITT) have signed a landmark agreement that is seen to expand opportunities for tourism development between the two countries.

This, as DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and MLIT Minister His Excellency Tetsuo Saito signed a Memorandum of Cooperation for tourism, the first standalone cooperation agreement between the two nations.

The contract was exchanged in the presence of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during the latter's first official visit to the Philippines from November 3 to 4.

Under the cooperation agreement, both countries agreed to strengthen and further develop Philippines-Japan ties in the field of tourism by increasing tourist arrivals for both countries from world tourist-generating markets; encouraging more tourists to visit various tourist destinations and attractions, including rural areas in each other's country; encouraging mutual visits and traffic of high-value-added travelers to increase tourism consumption; encouraging healthy growth of tourism industry of Philippines and Japan especially on the aspects of education, culture, gastronomy, sustainable tourism, and adventure.

"With the signing of this landmark Memorandum of Cooperation on Tourism under the Marcos Administration, the Philippines' bilateral relations with Japan is strengthened as we anticipate that this will exponentially expand tourism opportunities with the Japanese, which is one of our top source markets. This shall also usher in further tourism development in the fields of sustainability, air and sea connectivity, education, human capital development, culture, gastronomy, nature and adventure, which shall increase tourism revenues for our stakeholders, usher in more tourism investments, and create more jobs for our fellow Filipinos, as envisioned by our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.," Secretary Frasco said.

Japan is considered as one of the country's top source of visitors ranking third as of November 2, 2023, with nearly a quarter of a million arrivals into the Philippines.

Additionally, both countries will engage in the exchange of information on matters related to the industry; education and training; ensure means of mutual traffic through the enhancement of air and sea connectivity, and joint promotional programs, as well as enhance transport connectivity to sustain people-to-people exchange and the influx of travelers, and ensure tourist safety.

The Philippines and Japan also agreed to cooperate in terms of ensuring safety among tourists while they are staying in their respective countries.

A joint working group composed of senior officials from the DOT and MLITT will be convened for the proper implementation of the MOC which will run for five years and is subject for renewal.

As may be recalled, the Philippines and Japan formally established diplomatic relations in July 1956. ***DOT***

DOT chief joins global tourism leaders in WTM Ministers' Summit 2023 in London

London, United Kingdom - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco joined global tourism leaders for the highly regarded World Travel Market (WTM) Ministers' Summit in London, United Kingdom on November 06 to tackle the role of education in transforming the world's tourism industry.

Speaking before a high-level panel of tourism ministers and leaders attending the WTM, Secretary Frasco emphasized how the Department is making sure that education is being prioritized in the country's local tourism blueprint, not only to reap successes from the industry but ultimately, prioritize delivering "quality tourism education" to the Philippines' greatest tourism asset which is the Filipino people.

"Our Philippine government has applied a trifocal approach towards tourism education from basic education to technical vocational to higher education, as the Marcos administration envisions the Philippines to be the center for excellence in terms of tourism training [programs]," the tourism chief said.

"We also apply a convergence approach towards tourism education, wherein we are in constant coordination with the private sector by way of our Tourism Industry Board Foundation, a composite of organizations from the entire tourism value chain that continues to collaborate with government in order to ensure that the needs of the industry are matched with the curriculum that's provided by the schools," she further expounded, citing as well that even as early as basic education level up to postgraduate studies, the DOT is working alongside with the country's education institutions to make sure that students will land employment opportunities in tourism suited for their courses.

Though, there are limitations as to the purview of the DOT so far as education is concerned, the Department has partnered with government agencies, tourism industry private sector, and academic community to be able to facilitate in narrowing the gap in addressing the mismatch between industry requirements for manpower, and work readiness of the graduates of tourism and hospitality programs.

The initiatives specifically included: partnership with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), through membership in the CHED Technical Panel for Tourism and Hospitality Programs, where the DOT is actively giving inputs during review and updating of the curricula on tourism and hospitality courses; and the holding of the Tourism Human Resource Congress every two years to update the industry and the academe on new trends, and to discuss industry challenges.

The DOT also prepared a 5-year Philippine Tourism Human Capital Development Plan (2021- 2025) to identify challenges and outline strategies to develop and harness world-class Filipino tourism professionals. It also has a strong and expansive Tourism Industry Skills Program which provides free regular training sessions to tourism both for formal and informal workers to retool, upskill, and equip them with new knowledge and skills to be globally-competitive.

Training sessions are also being delivered to a wide segment of the tourism workforce from the different sectors, including members of community-based tourism organizations such as boatmen, souvenir vendors, massage therapists, taxi drivers, tourist police, among others.

The tourism chief also shared during the panel how the Philippines as a destination has been shaping up education tourism as it ranks fifth globally as a provider for English as a Second Language (ESL) to international source markets such as South Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and some emerging markets like Vietnam, Mongolia, and Russia.

"The Philippines also continues to educate not just Filipinos but foreign nationals in English, and that is a great source of pride for our country, our education tourism, that the Philippines ranks number five all over the world as a provider for English as a second language (ESL). And so, we feel that by investing in education both by way of training as well as in education tourism, we would be able to position the Philippines towards our President's vision of transforming it into Asia's tourism powerhouse," she stressed.

For 17 years, WTM gathers tourism leaders around the world, including the executives of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) to deliberate on tourism policy, strategy, development, and investment.

This year, tourism education takes center stage as the cornerstone of sustainable tourism development.

The UNWTO also forecasted the continued growth in international tourist arrivals in the coming years, when in 2030, it sees more than 300 million people being employed in the tourism sector.

Joining the panel at this year's WTM Ministers Summit were Natalia Bayona, UNWTO Executive Director; Julia Simpson, WTTC President and CEO; H.E. Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Hon. Sir John Whittingdale, Minister for Media, Tourism, and Creative Industries of the United Kingdom; Mr. Eijiro Yamakita, President and CEO of JTB Corp.; H.E. Mr. Arturo Bravo, Viceministro de Turismo of Colombia; H.E. Mr. Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno, Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia; H.E. Mr. Makram Mustafa A. Queisi, Minister of Tourism of Jordan; H.E. Mrs. Patricia de Lille, Minister of South Africa; H.E. Mr. Clayton Bartolo, Minister of Malta; and Mr. Tony Douglass, CEO of Riyadh Air.

"We sought to institutionalize the hospitality that Filipinos are known for all over the world and we feel that in capacitating our young people, as well as tourism workers from across the value chain is the values of Filipino hospitality and that we will be able to further elevate the quality of tourism that our country offers. The Philippines provides experiences for every kind of traveler. After all, we're now Asia's leading dive destination, Asia's best cruise destination and we are looking to defend our title as the world's leading beach and dive destination. There are so many reasons to love the Philippines, and at the heart of it all are our Filipino tourism workers," concluded the tourism chief to which the moderator, acclaimed broadcast journalist from BBC World Zeinab Badaw responded, *"Well, you've done a great sales job for the Philippines [in this summit] Secretary."*

DOT

DOT hails inclusion of CRK as world's most beautiful airport

Manila, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) celebrates the inclusion of Clark International Airport (CRK) as one of the world's most beautiful airports this year, earning the prestigious Prix Versailles, the World Architecture and Design Award of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"This accolade not only reflects the aesthetic grandeur of the Clark International Airport but also showcases the Philippines as a destination that values both function and beauty in its infrastructure. We are excited to continue welcoming travelers from around the world to experience the beauty of CRK and the Philippines," Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco remarked in response to the prestigious award received by CRK.

"The DOT is committed to continue our dedication to push for the improvement of our transport infrastructures in collaboration with other government agencies with the comfort and convenience of the traveling public, on top of our mind. Our vision reflects that of our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr's intention to position tourism as a pillar of economic growth for the country based on competitiveness that highlights Filipino uniqueness and ingenuity," added the Secretary.

According to https://www.prix-versailles.com/, the World's Most Beautiful Achievements recognition, granted by the Prix Versailles, "highlights the primary role of the Laureates in beautifying and improving the living environment." The awardees each year are those that have shown the world exceptional architecture and design.

Other airports that are part of the 9th edition list are Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport in Chile, Beijing Daxing International Airport in China, Berlin Brandenburg Airport in Germany, Chengdu Tianfu International Airport in China, Eagle County Regional Airport in the United States, Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport in Greece, General Abelardo L. Rodríguez International Airport in Mexico, Helsinki-Vantaa Airport in Finland, Kempegowda International Airport in India, LaGuardia Airport in the United States, Los Angeles International Airport in the United States, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport in the United States, Manchester Airport in the United Kingdom, Mohammed V International Airport in Morocco, New Plymouth Airport in New Zealand, Newark Liberty International Airport in the United States, Qingdao Jiaodong International Airport in China, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in the United States, Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport in China, Split Airport in Croatia, Thessaloniki Macedonia International Airport in Greece, Turkistan International Airport in Turkistan, and Van Don International Airport in Vietnam.

In 2021, CRK also emerged as one of the six world finalists for the same award.

Since her assumption to office as tourism chief, Secretary Frasco directed the maximization of the country's secondary gateways.

She and Department of Transportation (DOTr) Secretary Jaime Bautista have fostered strong collaborations on tourism and transport by engaging in convergence meetings since last year for the enhancement of tourism and transport sectors.

She also met with Luzon-based stakeholders in Clark as part of her listening tours in a bid to collaborate more in boosting tourist arrivals in CRK to further business tourism opportunities, particularly in Northern and Central Luzon.

As a gateway, Clark can serve as much as eight million passengers annually.

Currently, CRK services flights to the country's major tourist destinations like Caticlan (Boracay), Puerto Princesa and Busuanga, (Palawan), Davao, Cebu, Iloilo, Bacolod, General Santos, and Cagayan de Oro, while servicing international routes including Clark to Hongkong, Bangkok, and Singapore. ***DOT***

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Philippine tourism earnings surge to 404B in first 10 months of 2023 - DOT chief

San Francisco, California - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco showcased the country's tourism gains and recovery efforts post-pandemic, noting that the tourism industry has contributed an estimated USD 7 billion or about PHP 404.02 billion in foreign visitor receipts in the first ten months of 2023.

This amount is around 190 percent higher compared to the USD 2.47 billion, or PHP 138.46 billion in estimated visitor receipts recorded last year.

Secretary Frasco announced the good news as she joined the economic team of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in heralding the various investment opportunities in the Philippines to the international business community during the 2023 Philippine Economic Briefing (PEB) on local time, November 15 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in San Francisco, California.

"We have received over 4.63 million international visitors which constitutes 96 percent of our entire year's target, contributing over 7 billion US dollars to our economy," Secretary Frasco said.

Secretary Frasco also noted that the country's economic managers have manifested that tourism is the second top economic driver for the Philippines in the first half of 2023.

To note, 2022 concluded with tourism contributing 6.2 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Over 2.65 million foreign visitors came to the country, while 102 million domestic trips were recorded, resulting in more than 5.35 million persons employed in tourism industries.

"The Department of Tourism marks 50 years of bringing the world's attention to the immense beauty of our country, where tourism is a unifying force for good, and has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of our economy post-pandemic," Secretary Frasco said.

"As we usher in this golden era of tourism, the work of our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. has been to rally the entire nation, including the public and the private sector, from the national to the local governments, across the entire tourism value chain, to articulate that tourism is a priority. This prioritization, and if I may quote our President, goes beyond the mere provision of economic opportunities and jobs. Rather, it stems from the deep love that all of us Filipinos have for our country," she added.

Collaboration with the government's infrastructure and connectivity cluster

During the panel discussion of the country's economic managers, the tourism chief likewise shared how the goal of transforming the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse in Asia is being materialized by the DOT, and as infrastructure investments are prioritized through the Marcos Administration's Build Better More Program.

"We've engaged in a collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) for the purpose of continuing the tourism road infrastructure program, and as a result of that, over 158 kilometers of tourism roads have been constructed or rehabilitated this year, with more to come in 2024 and in succeeding years," she said.

In improving connectivity and tourist convenience, the DOT is also collaborating with the Department of Transportation (DOTr) not only for hard infrastructure investments but more importantly, for soft infrastructure or human capital development. This included the "Filipinization" of the country's airports and seaports, starting with the enhancement of the Terminal 2 of the country's main gateway, the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

"We have trained frontline tourism workers in our airports and seaports in the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence. This program, as a whole, has trained over 111,000 Filipino tourism workers across the tourism value chain," the Secretary added.

The DOT has also initiated the building of initial 10 tourist rest areas (TRA) in strategic locations across the country, with 18 more to come to enhance the overall tourist experience.

Moreover, the Philippines is expected to build five cruise terminals in the coming year, a project that the DOT actively supports under the auspices of the DOTr and the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), according to the Secretary.

Other cabinet officials who joined the panel were DPWH Secretary Manuel Bonoan, DOTr Secretary Jaime Bautista, and Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Raphael Perpetuo Lotilla.

Titled "Think Growth, Think Philippines," the PEB in San Francisco is one of the activities of the Philippine delegation on the sidelines of President Marcos Jr. 's working visit to the United States of America (USA) for the 30th edition of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit. ***DOT***

PH wins big at international award-giving bodies

Manila, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) is optimistic in raking more gains for the country's tourism as the Philippines bagged back-to-back wins as this year's favorite destination country among travelers, and 4th most desirable country for adventure.

Leading digital travel company in Southeast Asia, TripZilla, named The Philippines as the Destination of the Year in its ninth TripZilla awards.

Its citation describes, TripZilla cite The Philippines not only for its popular tourist attractions but also under-the-radar tourist offerings fit for all travel preferences. The wide range of tourist offerings, they say, keeps visitors coming back again to the country.

The Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), an attached agency of the DOT in charge of marketing and promotions, also won the Sustainability Leader of the Year for Asia from the same award-giving body.

Meanwhile, renowned travel magazine Wanderlust also regarded the Philippines as the 4th Most Desirable Country for Adventure on its 22nd Wanderlust Reader Travel Awards.

Jordan, one of the historic countries in the Middle East, topped this year's list, followed by Peru (2nd), the United States of America (3rd), and India (5th) clinching the last slot for the top 5 global wonders for adventure. The Philippines has bested tourist-favorites Australia (6th), New Zealand (7th), Saudi Arabia (8th), South Africa (9th) and Chile (10th).

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said that these awards affirm the Philippines' standing as a top-of-mind destination among all types of travelers.

"We are grateful for the global affirmation given to the extensive work that has been done to develop and promote our country. These recognitions underscore the Philippines' stunning landscapes, vibrant culture, and Filipino brand of service excellence that makes for an enhanced Philippine tourism experience under the Marcos Administration," Secretary Frasco remarked from the back-to-back accolades received by the country from TripZilla and Wanderlust magazine.

"On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has risen to our President's call for tourism transformation, which expands opportunities for livelihood and employment, driving the growth of the Philippine economy further," the Secretary added. ***DOT***

Photo courtesy of FOI Philippines

DOT wins FOI Champion Award

Manila, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) has won this year's Champion of Freedom of Information (FOI) Award conferred by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) at the awarding ceremony held at Hilton Manila in Pasay on November 21.

DOT Head of Records and Communication Section Maricel C. Malalad also won the Best FOI Receiving Officer.

"The award is an affirmation of the Department of Tourism's commitment to upholding transparency and accountability, and the freedom of information. We thank President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for his unparalleled support for tourism where, led by his drive towards inclusive tourism governance, we have reached out to as many sectors as possible and engaged with the public and private sectors in reviewing and revising policies, and implementing landmark programs that are responsive to the public's needs. We also thank the Presidential Communications Office and the 2023 FOI award screening committee for your diligent efforts in the deliberation process," said Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco in a statement.

"Today we celebrate good governance through the FOI awards. The DOT is proud to have made the cut for models of transparent, accountable and responsive departments. We pledge to continue our efforts to uphold these principles and to serve the Filipino people with integrity and passion. The Department of Tourism will continue to showcase the beauty of our nation and to share our cultural heritage with the world all while ensuring the principles of FOI are embedded in our work," Frasco also said in a message read by Assistant Secretary Gissela Marie Romualdez-Quisumbing.

In 2020, the DOT was awarded Top Performing Agency under the Department Level category; Rising Star Award under Department Level in 2021; and 1st Runner-Up Champion Award also under Department Level.

This year, the DOT received 455 FOI requests and the entire requests have been processed. Among its FOI efforts and initiatives over the years are also the issuances of memo and department orders for FOI compliance, such as the DOT FOI Manual which serves as a guide to DOT officials, employees, and the general public in the processing of any request for information.

The annual FOI Awards is organized by the Freedom of Information-Program Management Office (FOI-PMO) of the PCO which honors the efforts of government agencies across the Executive Branch, as well as institutional partners, individuals, and civil society organizations that significantly contributed to the development and success of the FOI Program implementation as well as those who have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to freedom of information. ***DOT***

DOT secures Senate nod on DOT Budget

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco expresses gratitude to the esteemed members of the Senate of the Philippines for their swift move to submit the proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 of the DOT and all of its attached agencies for the body's consideration.

"This approval from the Senate is very much appreciated by the entire Department, and a clear manifestation of our honorable Senators' relentless support towards the country's full tourism transformation. Our gratitude is due to our honorable Senators, who have demonstrated their strong commitment to their duty to meticulously review the budget proposals of all Departments before the House-Senate bicameral conference on the 2024 national budget," DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said.

The Department, Secretary Frasco noted, is especially heartened by the outpouring of support from the Senators led by Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri, who expressed support for a higher budget for the Department to aid in its promotion of Philippine tourism to boost the country's arrivals.

"Hopefully we reach five million by December. That's good news. And hopefully we can double it. Let's work hard. More ads. More ads, guys! Dagdagan natin ang budget nila para magka-ads tayo," Senate President Zubiri remarked, as Senator Nancy Binay, who sponsored and defended the DOT's budget, shared that the country has now received over 4.7 million as of November 21.

Senator Binay sponsored and defended the proposed Php 3.339 billion budget for the DOT and its attached agencies under the Senate Finance Committee report on House Bill No. 8980 or the 2024 General Appropriations Bill.

Meanwhile, the DOT assures that it will commence the investigation on the alleged inappropriate actions of Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA) General Manager Cynthia Carreon who sent text messages to certain Senators on the day of the plenary session to hurry up their deliberations. The Department deplores any form of disrespect to any of the members of the legislative branch of the government.

As pointed out by Secretary Frasco in an earlier statement, Ms. Carreon's actuations *"were of her own volition and clearly without imprimatur of the Department or any of its officials."*

The DOT likewise reiterates that it yields to the authority of the upper chamber of the Bicameral Congress of the Philippines and its constitutional mandate to deliberate upon the budget of all government agencies.

"The Secretary is a good friend of all Senators here. She never complained. Kahit siguro alas tres na ma-hear 'yung budget ng DOT, hindi magrereklamo 'yan. Because she knows what's happening here in Congress, or in the Senate in particular," Senator Jinggoy Estrada said in light of the incident.

Secretary Frasco had said she has ordered an immediate investigation and the same is underway.

"We will continue to work towards safeguarding and sustaining our gains so far so tourism may continue to be one of the strongest pillars of our economy, providing millions of jobs to our fellow Filipinos," Secretary Frasco said. ***DOT***

Philippines breaches 4.8M international visitor arrivals- DOT Chief

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines has breached its target of 4.8 million international visitor arrivals before yearend, Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco announced on November 28.

The tourism chief shared the good news during the DOT's 1st Philippine Golf Tourism Summit held at Grand Hyatt Manila that gathered tourism and golf industry leaders and stakeholders to engage in convergence with the government to explore and expand the full potential of the Philippine golf tourism industry.

As of November 27, 2023, the country has registered a total of 4,822,530 million visitors who visited the country, with foreign tourists still comprising the bulk of arrivals by 91.88 percent or 4,430,725, while the remaining 8.12 percent or 391,805 are returning overseas Filipinos.

Specifically, South Korea remains the country's top source market for foreign arrivals which brought in 1,271,602 tourists or 26.37 percent of the total, followed by the United States of America (USA) with 797,181 (16.53 percent), Japan with 272,735 (5.66 percent), China with 242,107 (5.02 percent), and Australia with 225,464 (4.68 percent) to complete the top five.

The Secretary emphasized that the support of the Marcos Administration for the DOT has been very instrumental in translating the targets into achievements.

"The Department of Tourism targeted 4.8 million international arrivals by the end of 2023. We have now welcomed over 4.82 million international visitors, contributing an impressive PHP404 billion in foreign visitor receipts to date underscoring the value of tourism to our economy. As our President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. has emphasized, tourism is a foundational pillar for the country's inclusive growth and economic revival. Tourism continues to drive growth and provide income and jobs nationwide. With the implementation of the National Tourism Development Plan 2023 to 2028 approved by President Marcos, we are beginning to see the merits of our strategies towards increasing connectivity, convenience, and equality in tourism development and promotions, as well as the invaluable partnership of our tourism stakeholders in the private sector," the tourism chief said.

"I am happy to share with you the report of our national economic managers that manifests that Philippine tourism is the second highest driver of economic growth for the Philippines. This cements our position as one of the strongest pillars of the Philippine economy that employs no less than 5.35 million Filipinos in the tourism industry sector, ensuring jobs, livelihood, and the well-being of communities all over the country," she added.

The liberalization of visa policies, the building of tourist rest areas, the establishment of the first ever multi-platform tourist call center, the construction of tourism roads, the development of cruise, education, medical, gastronomy, and sports tourism, expansion of dive tourism, and heritage and cultural tourism caravans and all other initiatives that have been lobbied by the DOT to attract visitors also contributed to these achievements, according to the Secretary.

Tapping the full potential of Golf Tourism

With the DOT also positioning the Philippines as a global hub for sports tourism, including golf, the tourism chief said that the time is now for the government and private sector to work together.

"Today marks the Philippines' long overdue foray into the multi-billion golf tourism industry that will no doubt have an enormous impact on the Philippine economy. And it's about time that the government and the private sector come together to converge and to collaborate," she said.

Currently, the Philippines has over 100 golf courses spread across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, with Santa Barbara Golf Course in Iloilo Province deemed as the oldest, which was built in 1907, thus, making the country a home to one of the oldest golf courses in Asia.

"Golf tourism represents a promising frontier for the Philippines and this summit highlights our proactive approach in understanding, nurturing, listening to the golf tourism industry and developing this niche as part of our tourism industry portfolio," Secretary Frasco said.

"We are hopeful that this first Philippine Golf Tourism Summit can be a catalyst and serve as a platform to gather insights, recommendations, and concerns, paving the way for informed decisions and strategies as well as a unified national government tourism policy towards golf tourism that can be aligned with our local government units all over the country," she concluded.

Panelists of the summit included Business Mirror Golf Editor Mike Besa who discussed "The Potential of Golf Tourism"; Outlast Sports and Entertainment Chief Executive Officer Salauddin SS who shared "The Right Market"; and Philippine Tour Operator Association (PHILTOA) President Fe Abling-Yu who discussed "First Tee With the Tourism Industry"; and Lipa, Batangas Vice Governor and founder of Golf Batangas Mark Leviste.

The summit was organized by the DOT's Office of Product Development of Golf Tourism and Special Projects. **DOT**

DOT gathers members of the diplomatic corps to promote Mindanao's halal cuisine and culture

Manila, Philippines - In a bid to further showcase Mindanao as a destination that is ready to offer a multi-dimensional tourism experience, the Department of Tourism gathered members of the diplomatic corps and some members of the international community to experience the region's halal cuisine and culture on November 22 at Dusit Thani Manila, Makati.

Titled "Bismillah: An Evening of Faith, Love, and the Flavors of Mindanao", the DOT-hosted event was a celebration of vibrant cultural unity and gastronomic richness of the region. The initiative is a continuation of Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco's push to fully reopen Mindanao to tourism which she cited as a priority of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. at the beginning of his administration last year. According to Secretary Frasco, efforts of the Department of Tourism towards building confidence in the region and raising awareness on the stability of the security situation would also aid in urging certain countries to upgrade or lift existing travel restrictions.

To recall, in May of this year, Secretary Frasco led the signing of a DOT agreement with the Department of National Defense (DND) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), to work together to promote the region as a peaceful and viable destination for domestic and international travelers.

"Beyond partaking of the delectable halal meals, this evening of faith, love, and the flavors of Mindanao is the start of something new that is opening your eyes, your palate to the possibilities that are endless in the promise that is Mindanao. As our President has said, Mindanao is the land of promise to be fulfilled," Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said in her speech.

The highlight of the event was the unraveling of the intricate and diverse halal cuisine of Mindanao to an international audience. Esteemed ambassadors, dignitaries, and officials from different foreign embassies in the Philippines were present to experience the flavor-filled odyssey through the vibrant tastes of the Mindanao Islands' cuisines with the ultimate intention to spread the invitation to their countrymen to come and visit Mindanao.

Inviting tourists to reconsider their perception of Mindanao, Secretary Frasco enthusiastically encouraged travelers, both local and international, to explore this vibrant island.

"In the pursuit of reinforcing the country's image as a halal-friendly destination the Department of Tourism has pursued various programs and projects started in the previous administration and continued under our President's administration. Other new initiatives that have manifested the commitment of the Marcos administration to fully reopen Mindanao to tourism is the milestone agreement that we signed with the Department of National Defense and the Department of Interior and Local Government to ensure that the reopening of Mindanao to tourism is firmly based on a data-based approach in terms of the very stable peace and order situation of the Mindanao regions," she said.

DOT Undersecretary Myra Paz Abubakar, whose DOT Office on Muslim Affairs organized the event, extended her heartfelt gratitude to all attendees, emphasizing the significance of cultural exchange and appreciation in fostering a more interconnected global community.

Meanwhile, Philippine National Police Chief of Security Operations Division Coronel Crisaleo Tolentino prov glimpse of the current safety environment that the Min regions enjoy.

"The issuance of EO 70 (creation of NTF-ELCAC) and its implementation in Mindanao Island institutionalized the whole-of-nation approach in attaining sustainable peace in Mindanao," PCol. Tolentino stressed.

"For our ways forward, we will sustain the current efforts, especially tourist police deployment in identified areas with

heavy tourist density, increase capability of tourist police units on scales and resources in partnership with the Department of Tourism, strengthen partnerships with tourism stakeholders to improve their services, and lastly conduct oversight activities to improve existing policies and strategies," the police officer said.

Treating guests with Gustatory Delights

While the event was formally opened by Chef Jam Melchor, revered as the founder of the Philippine Culinary Heritage Movement and a visionary behind the Filipino Food Month, the centerpiece of the evening was the specially curated halal degustation crafted by renowned Muslim Chefs such as Datu Shariff Pendatun II and Miguel Cabel Moreno. These culinary experts crafted an exquisite spread that tantalize taste buds while serving as a gateway to understanding the nuances and depth of Mindanawon cuisine.

Exquisitely and methodically served at the dinner tables was a rundown of Kinilaw (scallops, sea urchin and Spanish Mackerel in Three Lime Dressing) from Muslim Mindanao, Pisawawan a Sapi (Beef Shoulder, Turmeric, Chili, and Cassia Leaf Broth, Roasted Bone Marrow) from Lanao, Piyanggang Manuk (Grilled Free Range Chicken, Burnt Coconut Sauce) from Sulu, Dinilutan a Seda (Grilled Swordfish, Coconut and Lime Dressing) from Maguindanao, and Piyaren a Udang (Prawn, Coconut Meat Saute, Palapa Scallion Relish) from Lanao. These skillfully arranged delicacies are partnered with choice Davao, Tausug and Pandan rice.

The sumptuous pageantry of food was ended with a delightful serving of Mindanao Bounty, a dessert concocted from Malagos Dark Chocolate, Coconut Milk, Durian Ice Cream, Saba Banana Compote, Mango Compote, Dehydrated Pineapple and Coconut Dacqoise.

The dinner transcended gastronomic delight; it was an immersive experience designed to acquaint guests with the multifaceted features of the southern Philippines food. Throughout the event, the program guided attendees through an exploration of notable tourism locations across the five (5) Mindanao Regions and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The event was graced by various ambassadors to the Philippines namely Brunei Ambassador H.E. Megawati Manan, Malaysian Ambassador H.E. Dato Abdul Malik Melvin Castelino, Netherlands Ambassador H.E. Marielle Geraedts, Russian Ambassador H.E. Marat Pavlov, Pakistani Ambassador H.E. Imtiaz Ahmad Kazi, UAE Ambassador H.E. Mohamed Obaid Alqataam Alzaabi, Egypt Ambassador H.E. Ahmed Shehabeldin Ibrahim, as well as representatives from foreign embassies: Peace and Program Officer Johnson Badawi of the British Embassy, Deputy Head of Mission Mathias Kruse of the German Embassy, Japan Information and Culture Center Director Shigehiro Matsuda and Japan Information and Culture Center Press Officer Rintaro Shigeyoshi, A.H. Consulate of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Consul Michael Alexander Ang, Second Secretary Hasan Mehanna Al-Ajmi of the Qatar Embassy, Public Relations Specialist Awab Elahmar of the Qatar Embassy, Second Secretary Amanda Cheah of the Singapore Embassy, Cultural and Tourism Affairs Officer-in-Charge Witsarut Piyavongsomboon of the Royal Thai Embassy, and JUSMAG Training Programs Chief Major Khoa Tang of the Embassy of the United States of America.

The DOT considers the event as a testament to cultural harmony, exemplifying the beauty of diversity through the universal language of food.

As the Secretary aptly said at the end of her message, *"May this experience be as savory as it is memorable, and most of all, may the culinary delights of Mindanao that mirror that region's diverse, vibrant, and brimming with heritage, encourage all of you to entice your fellowmen to visit Mindanao and to savor Muslim Mindanao's varied tourism offerings. May the amount of love poured into the Halal Mindanao Cuisines this evening, as demonstrated by our Mindanaoan chefs' masterful artistry, show you more reasons to Love the Philippines."*

DOT

Capacity building activity of the Tourism Champions Challenge

Tourism officers from various cities and municipalities across the Philippines on November 22 converge in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, for the capacity building activity of the Tourism Champions Challenge (TCC) by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the TIEZA - Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority

Shortlisted from 90 local government units (LGUs), the 15 LGUs participating in the TCC capacity-building activity received instruction from esteemed project development and management expert Dr. Nicasio Agustin, as well as personal guidance from experienced tourism professionals acting as technical advisers. The focus of the week-long activity is to further refine their skills and competencies in designing and managing strategic and high-impact tourism projects geared to develop their local tourism industries.

Among the shortlisted LGUs invited in the DOT Office of Special Concerns-organized workshop include: Tagum City and Igacos (Samal) in Davao del Norte, Victorias City in Negros Occidental, Bolinao in Pangasinan, Badian in Cebu, Socorro in Oriental Mindoro, San Agustin in Surigao del Sur, Tubigon in Bohol, San Jose in Romblon, Davao City in Davao del Sur, Panay in Capiz, Ambaguio in Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela City in Basilan, Silago in Southern Leyte, and Sablayan in Occidental Mindoro. ***DOT***

18-day Campaign to End Violence Against Women

In a powerful demonstration of solidarity in observing the 18-day Campaign to End Violence Against Women (VAWC) and in supporting UNESCO's Orange the World Campaign, the Department of Tourism (DOT) on November 28 orchestrated a lighting ceremony in its Makati Central Office.

Internationally recognized as Orange Day, this symbolic initiative derives its name from the color orange, acknowledged by the United Nations (UN) Women as a poignant emblem representing a collective vision for a future free from violence against women.

DOT employees expressed their endorsement of this cause during a modest yet impactful ceremony spearheaded by DOT Undersecretary and Chief of Staff Elaine Bathan.

Speaking on behalf of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, Undersecretary Bathan expressed the DOT's pride in actively participating in the Orange the World Campaign, and highlighted the Department's commitment to championing the cause of ensuring the safety and well-being of women and children within the tourism sector.

Beyond symbolic gestures, the DOT has proactively engaged in comprehensive initiatives to address the issue at its core. The Department has organized seminars and focus group discussions where the importance of safeguarding women and children against various forms of abuse within the tourism industry is emphasized, reflecting its dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all, and in setting a precedent for responsible and empathetic tourism practices.

In undertaking these multifaceted efforts, the DOT not only stands with women but takes substantive steps to create a tourism landscape where every individual, regardless of gender, can thrive without fear of violence or discrimination.

The said lighting ceremony was led by the DOT through its Office of Special Concerns headed by Director Annavie Bacomo-Lapitan. ***DOT***

Cordillera Festival of Festivals

In a grand showcase of the region's vibrant cultural tapestry, the Department of Tourism-Cordillera Administrative Region Office (DOT-CAR) stages its second edition of the Cordillera Festival of Festivals on November 11 in Baguio City.

The festival serves as a unifying platform, bringing together seven diverse festivals from the provinces of Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, and the City of Baguio, highlighting the rich heritage of the Cordillera Administrative Region. The event also commemorates the Indigenous People's (IP) Month every October each year.

Representing Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco during the Cordillera Festival of Festivals 2023 in Baguio City, DOT Undersecretary Ferdinand "Cocoy" Jumapao highlighted that the festival bring the immense beauty of the Cordilleras to life, connecting its people with their history, land, and heritage.

"In this region, there's a spectacular array of festivals, each unique and emblematic of the communities that celebrate them. They represent the beating heart of this land, connecting its people with their history, their land, their ancestors," he said.

"From the awe-inspiring Panagbenga Festival in Baguio City, with its enchanting flower floats, to the ang-ay Festival in Mountain Province, which showcases the rich indigenous heritage of the Cordilleras, these celebrations are a testament to the diversity that is at the heart of this region. They're living history, preserving the past while celebrating the present, and looking forward to the future," the Undersecretary added.

According to Undersecretary Jumapao, the festival stands as evidence of enduring traditions that thrive and evolve, contributing to the vibrant cultural tapestry of the country.

Now in its second year, the event stands as a testament to the rich tapestry of traditions, colors, and stories that encapsulate the beauty of the Cordillera Region, fostering unity and diversity.

According to Director Jovita Ganongan, the festival was envisioned as a platform to showcase the rich culture and heritage of the Cordilleras, "attesting to the commitment of the DOT-CAR in promoting cultural diversity, fostering unity, and bolstering tourism within the region" that also takes inspiration from DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco's encouragement to pursue love for the Philippines by instilling pride of place and love of culture.

Highlighting the uniqueness of Cordillera's culture, she also emphasized its distinctive blend of indigenous traditions, rich heritage, and vibrant festivals which serves as a "compelling draw for tourists seeking authentic and enriching experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the region's customs and its people."

Ending her remarks, Director Ganongan also expressed gratitude to the guests and performers stating, "Your dedication to preserving and sharing the stories of the Cordillera people is truly commendable. As we embark on this extraordinary journey through the Cordillera Festival of Festivals, let us collectively acknowledge and celebrate the artistry, craftsmanship, and cultural wealth that adorn this vibrant region."

Mayor Benjamin B. Magalong emphasized that the gathering transcends mere celebration, stating, "it is a reminder of our shared history and the resilient spirit that defines us as people."

Congressman Mangaoang also paid homage to the ancestors who have passed down the traditions and kept the culture alive.

"We honor the ancestors who have passed down the traditions that make us who we are today. We recognize the hard work and dedication of our people who have preserved and enriched our cultural heritage," the Congressman remarked.

"It is a celebration of our past, a reflection of our present, and a vision for our future. It is an invitation to embrace the beauty of our shared identity and ensure that the legacy passed down to our children is one of love, acceptance, and unity," he added.

In his closing remarks, Director Atanacio Addog concluded that the festival "is a living tableau of Cordillera life—an embodiment of how we have conscientiously preserved our culture, a testament to the talent embedded in our communities." He also commended the Department of Tourism (DOT) for conceptualizing the activity, providing an avenue "to unveil the heartbeat of life in the Cordillera region."

LAPAT FESTIVAL

Wearing shades of blue and red, performers depicted the Province of Apayao's Lapat Festival.

'Lapat' is a method of the Isnag people where they demonstrate the regulation of natural resources to provide for the recovery, healing, and regeneration of forests and animals. The Lapat system of the Isnag, is one of the oldest practices of the province that was also credited for increasing the population of the critically-endangered Philippine Eagle.

Featured as the newest festival in the region that focuses on the preservation and protection of natural resources, the Isnag people believe that instilling these cultural practices ensures the continuation of a heritage that champions conservation and sustains the unique beauty of Apayao.

GOTAD AD IFUGAO FESTIVAL

The Province of Ifugao brought the Gotad Ad Ifugao Festival, an annual celebration honoring the culture of Ifugao.

The festival showcased a reenactment of the journey to celebrate the Hagabi Feast, reserved solely for the affluent Kadangyan couples or wealthy people of Ifugao, who desire to have a feast in a certain community.

It also highlights the Hagabi, a wooden bench meticulously crafted from a Narra or Molave tree symbolizing wealth, power, and prestige, which is used by the Kadangyan couple after following a sequence of rituals and celebrations done for the feast.

ADIVAY FESTIVAL

A display of the indigenous culture of the Province of Benguet, the Adivay Festival is an annual event that brings together indigenous groups from the 13 towns of Benguet in a grand celebration that allows the sharing of cultural beliefs and practices.

The agri-tourism festival is named after the Ibaloi term "Adivay" meaning "coming together", featuring Benguet's traditional dances, chants, and indigenous food.

Annually observed in November, the Adivay Festival is currently underway, continuing its festivities until December 9, 2023.

PANAGBENGA FESTIVAL

The well-known flower festival celebrated every February in Baguio City, the Panagbenga Festival was showcased once again during the Cordillera Festival of Festivals 2023 held at the Rose Garden, Burnham Park.

Panagbenga means "a season of blooming" and honors the abundance of flowers, creativity, and rich cultural heritage of Baguio and the Cordilleras.

LANG-AY FESTIVAL

With their traditional gongs creating music and cultural dances, the Mountain Province showcased the Lang-ay Festival which celebrates the customary living tradition called "Lang-ay" meaning fellowship, sharing happiness, nurturing friendships, strengthening family ties, and fostering brotherhood.

Celebrated annually during the month of April, the Lang-ay Festival features street dancing and indigenous games, among others, that resonate with the rich cultural heritage of the IPs of the Mountain Province.

MATAGOAN FESTIVAL

Bringing the rich cultural history from the Tabukeños of Kalinga province, the Matagoan Festival shares the vibrant colors of Tabuk City, symbolizing the unity, harmony, and tranquility that aims to be fostered among Tabukeños and the city's visitors.

The Banga Dance is also featured in the festival, portraying the use of clay pots on their head to fetch water for their families. The said traditional dance fest was also recognized last February by the Guinness World Record for having the Largest Banga Dance consisting of 4,681 participants.

LAGA FESTIVAL

The term "Laga" in Kalinga means weaving, a skill passed down through generations. Women skillfully wove textiles and crafted beads, while men expertly crafted soft brooms, baskets, and backpacks.

Textiles with intricate patterns, reflecting the weaving techniques of the indigenous community in Lubuagan, were shown with pride during the festival performance. The Laga Festival celebrates the time-honored cultural expression of traditional artwork as the community's dignified source of income, livelihood, and employment. ***DOT***

Philippine Experience - Western Visayas!

Tourism stakeholders, including tour operators, travel agencies, government officials, and media representatives of the Philippine Experience Program (PEP) kicked off their exploration in Western Visayas on November 29.

Spearheaded by Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, PEP is a nationwide cultural tourism development initiative aimed at spotlighting the rich Filipino identity and the captivating allure of the Philippines in the realm of travel and tourism.

The participants made its first stop at the historic Silay City Heritage Zone, followed by Slow Food at Casa A. Gamboa in the Province of Negros Occidental, where food is produced or prepared in accordance with local culinary traditions using high-quality locally sourced ingredients.

PEP Western Visayas marks the DOT's fourth regional launch of the flagship program, following successful events in the Davao, CALABARZON, and Bicol Regions.

Love for Slow Food

First of the several stops for the day is a slow food experience at Casa A. Gamboa in Silay City. Members of the Slow Food Cooks Alliance and Coffee Coalition introduced Negrense Heritage dishes and slow food culinary delights to the participants of the Western Visayas edition of the Philippine Experience Program (PEP). Some of the gustatory treats served for the occasion included Kesong Puti Pandesal, Binatwanan nga Chicken and Pork Adobo Pandesal, Blue Crab Bun, and Panara, a turn-over pastry fried with mung bean sprouts.

Also served were tasty sweets such as Puto Lanson, rice cake made of cassava, glutinous rice and coconut milk; Piaya, the famous pressed pastry with muscovado sugar filling; and Binandoy, a sweet potato dessert with toasted coconut.

"Manyaga kita!" (Let's have lunch)

Delegates of the Western Visayas PEP feasted on a Bacolodnon lunch at Bantug Lake Ranch, Supercity Bacolod.

Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and the whole PEP delegation were welcomed by Bacolod Mayor Albee Benitez to a sumptuous traditional Bacolod spread.

Guests enjoyed KBL, and Inubaran na Manok, for appetizers: Atchara, Ensalada nga Langka, Apan-apan (Adobong Kangkong), Kinilaw na Tangigue, for main course: Bacolod Chicken Inasal three-ways: Classic (Aida's), Native (Lion's), and Contemporary (Bantug), Inasal Nga Isol and Isaw; dipping sauce combinations; and for dessert: Napoleones, Sorbetes, and Piaya.

Negros Occidental guides receive Love from DOT

In a cherished moment during the slow food experience at Casa A. Gamboa in the Silay City segment of the PEP in Western Visayas, DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco warmly engaged with local tour guides from the region.

The tourism chief personally distributed tour guiding kits local guides, as a token of DOT's appreciation, ensuring they are well-equipped for their roles. The thoughtfully curated kits included essential items such as hats, electronic lapel microphones, sunblock, bamboo tumblers, bamboo sunglasses, and journals.

On the second day of the PEP in Western Visayas, DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and delegates explored the Garin Farm in San Joaquin, Iloilo.

This agricultural haven seamlessly blends farming, recreation, and spirituality, boasting a pilgrimage resort renowned for its 456-step Stairway to Heaven, stations of the cross, Bible Stories enactment and features such as Noah's Ark, a monumental cross, and the all-white heaven interpretation.

Beyond its spiritual allure, Garin Farm also features leisure activities like zip-lining, buggy car driving, boat paddling, fishing, and swimming, offering a multifaceted experience for visitors.

During their visit, delegates actively engaged in the Panghawan hawan ritual and Carmen Ceremony, as they further immerse in the rich cultural and spiritual tapestry of the region. San Joaquin Mayor Ninfa Garin welcomed the delegation of the three-day caravan.

Ilonggo pilgrimage and architecture

Following the pilgrimage trail, the Western Visayas PEP delegation visited two significant Ilonggo Catholic churches—San Joaquin Church and Miagao Church.

Constructed with limestone sourced from the Igbaras mountains and gleaming white coral stones from San Joaquin's shores, the historic San Joaquin Church boasts a facade adorned with rosettes and vertically divided by engaged columns.

Above the arched portal, a plaque featuring the Augustinian seal flanked by cherubs adds to its architectural splendor.

Meanwhile, DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the visit to the Church of Saint Thomas of Villanova, commonly known as the Miagao Church, the Roman Catholic parish church of the town of Miagao in Iloilo Province.

Renowned for the intricate sculptural relief on its facade, the church earned distinction in 1993 as one of the best examples of the Baroque Churches of the Philippines, securing a spot on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

The PEP Western Visayas delegates visited the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), an intergovernmental organization established to advance sustainable fisheries development.

The SEAFDEC Aquaculture Department (SEAFDEC/AQD), based in the Philippines and founded in 1973, is dedicated to researching, developing technologies, disseminating information, and providing training in the cultivation of fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and seaweeds for food, livelihood, equity, and sustainable development.

Situated in Tigbauan, Iloilo, SEAFDEC's Aquaculture Development facility spans 40 hectares, featuring various research laboratories, hatcheries, and broodstock tanks.

Visitors can also explore FishWorld, a museum-aquarium-visitor center designed for science and environmental education covering aquatic ecosystems, marine rescue, biodiversity, aquaculture, fisheries, ecotourism, and aquatic sciences.

The 30-minute regular tour at FishWorld comprises a 10-minute briefing or institutional video, allowing 20 minutes to delve into poster exhibits, observe aquarium animals, and explore museum collections.

Supporting the Negros local communities through shopping

In support of the hundreds of local micro-small to medium enterprises and local communities of Negros Oriental, delegates of the PEP Western Visayas went on a shopping spree at the Association of Negros Producers Inc. (ANP) Negros Showroom on November 30.

Housed at Lacson St., Bacolod City, this one-stop shop is a treasure trove of gifts and houseware; furniture and furnishings; food; natural and organic; fashion and garments; tourism; and agriculture products.

Delegates explored an array of ANP Negros Showroom gems, including capiz-lined trivets, locally crafted chandeliers, stylish textiles and formal wear, repurposed wine bottle creations, delectable delicacies, sugarcane wonders, and an assortment of exclusive trinkets showcasing the province's distinct charm.

The Negros Showroom proudly highlights the best of Negros' products, embodying the artistry and craftsmanship of local artisans.

Preserving Iloilo's signature weave — Hablon

In highlighting Iloilo's cultural heritage, the Department of Tourism (DOT) featured the region's iconic textile, Hablon, in the latest leg of its Philippine Experience Program (PEP).

Crafted through a traditional handloom technique, Hablon utilizes natural fibers like abaca, piña, and cotton, and often features plaid or checkered patterns in vibrant hues.

The term "hablon" finds its roots in the Hiligaynon word "habol", and signifies both the act of weaving and the resulting fabric.

During the PEP Western Visayas edition, delegates learned about the intricate process of Hablon making through weaving demonstrations at the Miagao Cultural Center and Sol Y Mar Ecofarm in Tigbauan, Iloilo.

Known globally for its exceptional quality, Iloilo Hablon is a popular material for creating clothing and accessories, ranging from shawls to patadyong (wraparound skirts) and formal wear like gowns. ***DOT***

DOT bares efforts to support vibrant tourism landscape of Northern Luzon

The Department of Tourism (DOT) officially opens the second edition of the North Luzon Travel Expo (NLTE) on November 25 at the CAP Convention Center in Camp John Hay, Baguio City.

Under the leadership of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, the DOT launched the inaugural edition of NLTE last year in Clark with the goal of boosting the country's domestic tourism and fostering stronger tourism exchange and promotions across various regions.

This year, NLTE returns on an even grander scale, anticipating over 1,000 daily visitors and hosting more than 100 exhibitors and sellers in the Summer Capital of the Philippines and the UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art.

According to the Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, under the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023-2028 approved by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., the DOT is prioritizing the diversification of the country's tourism portfolio and promotion of sustainable tourism. The tourism chief underscored how the Department is putting equal emphasis on the facets of our country's tourism strengths, particularly those that "have yet to be fully discovered by the world."

"Indeed, we have not yet fully told the Filipino story, the story that lies in our heritage, our culture, our people, our indigenous tribes, our ethnolinguistic groups, the work of the hands of artisans, makers, and weavers, living cultural traditions that have been passed on from one generation to another. That is alive and well here in Northern Luzon," Secretary Frasco said.

In expanding the country's tourism portfolio, Secretary Frasco acknowledged the crucial role of the local government units (LGUs) as "gatekeepers of the Filipino identity" and in the implementation of programs such as the NLTE.

"Sabi nga nila: sa turismo may trabaho, sa turismo, may asenso. And that is why we have continued to push for the full reopening of tourism as well as to ensure that the benefits of tourism are not only felt in certain places in the country, but rather are felt to as far as possible across our beautiful provinces in the nation. Initiatives like this are crucial in continuing our efforts towards elevating the status of the Philippines as far as tourism is concerned in Asia and the world, towards fulfilling our President's goal of becoming Asia's next tourism powerhouse," she added.

The DOT, under the initiative of Secretary Frasco, launched the inaugural edition of NLTE last year in Clark, with the goal of boosting the country's domestic tourism and fostering stronger tourism exchange and promotions across various regions.

To further support the vibrant tourism landscape of Northern Luzon, Tourism Christina Garcia Frasco provided an overview of the Department of Tourism's (DOT) efforts to empower stakeholders, particularly the region stakeholders on a community level.

"Our primary focus is to empower our local stakeholders, from community-based enterprises to tour operators, and equip them to become ambassadors of our tourism attractions, promoting and ensuring so that the region becomes an unforgettable experience for every visitor, by providing resources, training, funding, and platforms to enhance tourism offerings fostering a resilient and sustainable tourism environment," Secretary Frasco said before guests and visitors of the second edition of the flagship expo of the DOT.

"From the breathtaking sceneries of the Mountain Province, the historical charm of Vigan, and the refreshing scent of pine trees here in Baguio City, the rich blend of experiences that Northern Luzon offers holds strong potential to captivate visitors as well as drive bookings and increase tourists arrivals," she enthused.

Secretary Frasco added that the DOT aspires to position the region as an alluring hotspot for those in search of both natural beauty and cultural abundance.

"In support of these endeavors, we recognize the vital role of the global network of tourism in making Northern Luzon a hub for collaborations and knowledge exchange. By creating these networking platforms such as the North Luzon Travel Expo, we strengthen the ties that bind our tourism community, promoting our shared goals to ensure the success of the region as a whole, as a premier tourist destination, both to international as well as local travelers," she explained.

The NLTE is proudly organized by the DOT through its Office of Tourism Regulation, Coordination & Resource Generation (TRCRG), Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Regions I, II, and III Offices, and co-organized by the Association of Travel and Tours Management in the Cordilleras (ATTIC). ***DOT***

TO OUR DECEMBER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATORS

1 Charlotte Monique Guerrero
2 Josephine Andaya
2 Lelia Blancaflor
3 Francisco Hilario Lardizabal
3 Reynaldo Manapao Jr.
3 Gloriece Glen Do
5 Denise Alysson Anderson
5 Marc Ramiro Ortiz Luis
5 Emie Chloie Mejala
6 Rowena Lopez
7 Elaine Joy Serrano
8 Mary Alianette Domanais
8 Emmanuel Alfaro
9 Ronaldo Gam
9 Maria Teresita Caringal
10 Rufo Calimaran
10 Mohamed Ainshams Madale
11 Lord Berrei
11 Fay Lena Castro
11 Eunice Tarun
14 Ruperto Generoso Jr.
14 Carolyn Gabriel
14 Divina Dulay
14 Anabelle Grutas
15 Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez
15 Wilson Telig
15 Ruth Elequin
15 Reyza Orilla
17 Mary Grace Antonio-Torres
18 Carlito Reyes
18 Phoebe Zelie Areño
20 Ronnie Agan
21 Thomas Santos
22 Judy Colaljo
22 Resther Jay Porwelos
23 Mary Jane Cabilla
23 Marie Nelna Lantano
25 Ma. Esperanza Christina Garcia Frasco
25 Mary Cris Gulfan
25 Joy Cunanan
26 Avon Timbol
28 Catherine Agustin
28 Jo Allen Ual
28 Jhera San Valentin
28 Rochelle Anne Eneria
28 Rae Marrie De Mesa
29 Daisy Omoso
30 Kathleen Flores
30 Rhizza Espiritu